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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE
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EDITORIAL

AN OPPORTUNITY AND A RESPONSIBILITY

In a very real sense the universities of the country are the guardians of the research interests of science. From them come the trained investigators who constitute by far the main contingent of investigators. For many years also they have been the chief source of contributions to new knowledge, but now they are strongly challenged by research institutions and commercial laboratories in this field. This, in itself, is encouraging because of the increased opportunities it gives investigators for the conduct of their studies; but it carries a potential menace to all science on account of the depletion in the supply of investigators produced by the premature withdrawal of men from university training, and because of the temptation offered experienced investigators to leave university positions, attracted by better opportunities for work and by more ample financial support.

In the nature of the case, so long as universities occupy their present position in the educational system, they must supply the trained men who form the research forces of the country. Any influences which militate against the conditions under which this trained personnel is developed are directed against the best interests of science. At the present time, under the stimulus given to many industries by war activities, with the consequent recognition of the value of science in their conduct, investigators are offered many tempting opportunities outside of educational institutions. Some of these are of such a character that they cannot wisely be refused and there has been a resulting movement of considerable magnitude away from university laboratories. In recognition of this fact, in relation to the subjects of physics and chemistry, the Rockefeller Foundation has established a system of research fellowships in the National Research Council in the hope that young investigators might be retained in university contact long enough to prevent deterioration in the quality of attainment and, if possible, to establish their permanent interest in educational work. In another way this condition has been recognized by a committee of the Division of Medical Sciences of the National Research Council which has pointed out the danger to medical instruction, resulting from a lack of competent teachers of preclined branches. The danger to science is indeed acute and grave.

Since the Sigma Xi is the one national organization concerned with scientific research and intimately associated with the institutional conditions involved in its promotion, it has a peculiar and insistent obligation to consider this problem and to take active steps to remedy conditions. The situation is a very complicated one, reaching down into the very depths of our educational system. It presents a problem which cannot be solved by any hasty or superficial consideration. But since it is a question of educational institutions in relation to scientific research it is a problem peculiarly adapted for study by the Society. Some of our chapters have made a survey of the research output of their institutions and others are thus engaged. The broader problem of determining what can be done to better the conditions under which university research is conducted and investigators developed has not been studied. Is this not something which our chapters should seriously consider?